DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 391 209 CS 509 157

AUTHOR Ferris, Sharmila Pixy
TITLE The Experimental Social Scientific Model in Speech Communication Research: Influences and Consequences.
PUB DATE Nov 95
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (81st, San Antonio, TX, November 18-21, 1995).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Research; Models; Research Methodology; *Research Needs; Research Problems; *Social Science Research; *Speech Communication
IDENTIFIERS *Historical Background; *Humanistic Research; Speech Communication Association

ABSTRACT

A substantial number of published articles in speech communication research today is experimental/social scientific in nature. It is only in the past decade that scholars have begun to put the history of communication under the lens. Early advocates of the adoption of the method of social scientific inquiry were J. A. Winans, J.-M. O'Neill, and C. H. Woolbert. Another influential early scholar, Everett Hunt, openly criticized the adoption of the social scientific method and strongly advocated the use of the humanistic model. This disagreement led to the early development of two separated emphases within the discipline still seen today. In addition, a problem exists not in the use of the social scientific method, but its use without the primary development of a body of original theory it could build up and support. Far too little of the experimental social scientific research in communication is linked to some established theoretical body original and exclusive to this field. Too much of communication is borrowed from related disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and philosophy. It is time to rethink the early influences and work toward the adoption of a new research combining social scientific/humanistic research influences, stressing the spirit of inquiry. (Contains 17 references.) (CR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Running Head: ESS MODEL

The Experimental Social Scientific Model in Speech Communication Research: Influences and Consequences

Sharmila Pixy Ferris

William Paterson College

Paper to be presented at the 1995 Speech Communication Association Annual Convention, San Antonio, Texas

ED 391 209

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. P. Ferris

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Address: 211 Hobart Hall
Department of Communication, WPC
300 Pompton Road
Wayne, NJ 07470
Phone: 201-595-3338
Email: spferris@frontier.wilpaterson.edu

CS 509 157

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

A substantial amount of published articles in speech communication research today is experimental social scientific in nature. Given the impact of scientific research in the establishment and legitimization of communication as an academic discipline, an examination of the history of incorporation of research into the discipline would seem of value. Yet it is only in the past decade that scholars have begun to put the history of communication under the lens. This paper examines the early advocates (i.e., Winans, O'Neill, Woolbert, and Hunt) of the use of research in communication. It also considers some of the consequences of the initial adoption of the experimental social scientific model over the humanistic model.

The Experimental Social Scientific Model in Speech Communication Research: Influences and Consequences

Much research today in both the 'hard' and 'social' sciences relies on the use of a scientific model. This involves the concept of validation of theory, through the use of testable assumptions, and through replication. Such research has largely been empirical and quantitative in nature, although it should be recognized that this is not an essential characteristic of the scientific model. Rather, essential features of the scientific model are a stress on objectivity, validity, and replicability. The model also emphasizes the development of theoretical models with some predictive or explanatory potential.

Such a social scientific model is in use in communication research, and has been since the early days of the discipline. The development of experimental social scientific research can be seen in a historical review of the publications in the field. In the first 20 years (1914-1934) of Speech Communication 7.3% of all articles published were strongly experimental and social scientific in form and content (Knower, 1935). Given the exploratory and largely pedagogical nature of publication of the period, the percentage is remarkably high. This number more than doubled in the next 24 years (1935-1959), with 16.1% of all published articles being experimental in content & or form (Brooks, 1959). In the ensuing decades the percentages of such research grew steadily. As manifested in two of the leading Speech Communication national journals[1], the Quarterly Journal of Speech (hereafter QJS) and Communication Monographs (hereafter CM), the percentages of experimental research were as follows: in 1960 it rose to 26.32%; in 1970, 17.86%; in 1980, 44.68%; and in 1990 53.57%.

These figures demonstrate that a substantial portion of published articles in speech communication is experimental social scientific in nature. How an experimental social scientific model came to be adopted in a discipline that, at its inception, saw itself primarily as a

[1] Continuing the research of Knower (1935) and Brooks (1959), the Quarterly Journal of Speech and Communication Monographs were chosen as representative of the field. The survey was begun where Brooks' research ended. The years 1960, 1970, 1980 & 1990 were chosen as representative of the preceding decades.

performance field, is an issue that should be of interest to communication practitioners. Yet, in spite of the "important implications for development" that arose from the use of "scientific justification" (Frey, Botan, Friedman & Kreps, 1991, p.23) it is only in the past decade that the history of communication has become of interest to scholars (Bochner & Eisenberg, 1985; Cohen, 1994; Leff & Procario, 1985). This paper will examine the early influences in the discipline that promoted the adoption of the experimental social scientific model, and consider some of the consequences. As Cohen (1994) points out, an examination of the early influences and developments, or the formative periods in the history of the Speech Communication is necessary in order for us to understand the present state of the field.

The founders of the discipline set the stage for development. Speech Communication established itself as an organized discipline in April, 1910. It was then less a new discipline than the separation of a few teachers of public speaking from English departments. Originally, hence, Speech Communication saw itself as a performance field, with its primary concern being the teaching of public speaking. Unlike any other similarly formed, derivative discipline, Speech Communication was not established due to any conceptual differences with its 'parent' field. This is the foundation of the problem for, as Cohen (1985) points out, merely being a derivative field is not a bad thing. Yet the nature of our founding created a profound ambivalence about the purpose of the field--teaching skills, or advancing scholarship. The purpose of this paper is not to consider whether Speech Communication has succeeded or failed as a performance field, but solely to consider its incorporation of research into the discipline. For today we do consider ourselves such a research field, committed to the advancement of scholarship. What, however, is the purpose of such scholarship? Initially, it was seen as a necessary passport to acceptance in the academic community. What the scope of research should be, however, was a question that was hotly debated by such scholars as, O'Neill, Winans and Hunt, among others, and will be considered later in the paper. One of the outcomes of these debates was the adoption of the experimental social scientific model and the subsequent development of the discipline in its existing form.

Hard upon our founding as a discipline came the first push towards the incorporation of research. The early scholars were clearly aware of the importance and impact they would have on the discipline of the future. O'Neill. (1916) the newly elected President of the newly formed speech association said that "the next generation will be largely conditioned by the atmosphere in which we train our students today". He took the encouragement of research as Speech Communication's very first goal. In the first issue of QJS. O'Neill (1915) stated:

> First we wish to promote and encourage research work in various parts of the field of public speaking: we wish to encourage and assist individuals and committees who will undertake by *scientific investigation* to discover the true answer to certain problems. (p. 56) (Italics mine)

That research was considered valuable and essential is understandable in the spirit of the times. when the university was becoming established as a research institution. the passport to which appeared to be scholarly research. What is not as understandable was that O'Neill was advocating the undertaking of research with no clear idea as to what would be the subject of this research. From the very outset. thus. one strong advocate of the use of research focused on the means rather than the end. on method rather than on the spirit of inquiry.

This is not to say that the founders of Speech Communication did not appreciate the value of inquiry. It is evident that they realize the need for a focus on the development of theoretical models. The Research Committee stated that "One of the very first requirements is to catch the spirit of scholarly inquiry" (1915. p. 194). What the founders were unsure about was the means by which this should be accomplished. The Research Committee advocated "analogy" or imitation. The implications were that what would be learned from other disciplines were the tools for the undertaking of research rather than a true spirit of inquiry into what should be the purview of the field.

Already a danger existed for the discipline to be led astray into scientism rather than scientific inquiry. Yet at that point it was still possible for a recognition of the potential problems. This opportunity was provided by Winans. the Vice-President of the newly formed Association.

Winans (1915, April) indicated that he felt that the new discipline of Speech Communication would be dependent on other disciplines, but he saw the process as adaptive and temporary. He said,

> For some time, probably, while we are learning the use of our tools, our work would be adaptation. Then we shall be able to take up many problems that others will not touch (pp. 20-21)

Winans' idea was to learn from other fields, without being dependent on them, and then utilize what was learnt to undertake the true quest for undiscovered knowledge which is the ultimate aim of science. Unfortunately Winans was rather simplistic in his outlook on *how* we should seek knowledge in order to "graduate" to the real thing after our apprenticeship was over. He seemed to feel that it would come automatically once the field had reached a certain point, "when we have established a body of established knowledge" (p. 23). Winan's failure to establish specific guidelines for the transition from a derivative field to an independent one was a flaw in the successful development of the discipline.

Charles Woolbert further established the social scientific model, first advocated by O'Neill and Winans. As the first member of the new discipline to receive a doctorate in a social scientific field (psychology), Woolbert was a strong proponent of the social scientific model. He was quite narrow and limited in his views of what comprise research and what makes up science. He seemed to equate the value of a discipline with its adherence to scientific standards (Woolbert, 1916). Yet he did recognize that what he was propounding arose out of certain necessities, and was aware of the deeper causes behind the for social scientific research. He says that he

> stand(s) for a search for the facts: the facts of how speaking is done: of what its various effects are under specified conditions: how these facts can be made into laws and principles: and how other people can best be taught to apply them... we need to get together on some commonly accepted basis. The only one I know of comes from scientifically conducted research and investigation. Hence I stand for research..." (p. 264).

Woolbert's presentation of a detailed and exhaustive list of topics that could be studied, all highly experimental or social scientific in nature, furthered the cause of research in the developing field of communication.

Not only did the three great proponents of the social scientific method -- O'Neill, Winans and Woolbert -- openly advocate an adoption of the method of social scientific inquiry, but all three indicated in their writings some idea of the true nature of social scientific research. O'Neill wished to "discover the true answer to certain problems" (1915, p.56). Winans had faith in the "worth and inspiration of knowledge" (1915, July). Woolbert's ultimate goal was to "find and teach truth" 1916, p. 265).

Although the experimental social scientific model was strongly advocated by some of the most prominent founders of Speech Communication, it was not the only model to be advocated. Another influential early scholar, Everett Hunt, openly criticized the adoption of the social scientific method. He strongly disagreed with Winans, O'Neill, and Woolbert, saying that he protested emphatically "against the worship of scientific research as the summum bonom in our profession" (QJS, 1915, p. 186). Later, he says, "My charge against the technical expert is not that his methods and facts are not valuable and necessary, but that he tends to overlook the whole question of arousing intellectual curiosity." (QJS, 1917, p. 31). Hunt attempted to provide an alternative to the social scientific model, strongly advocating a humanistic model.

Although Hunt's purpose was a valid and even praiseworthy one, the manner in which he pursued it, and the refusal of Winans, O'Neill and Woolbert's single-minded focus on promoting their own viewpoints instead of working with each other to develop an integrated focus, led to the early development of two separated emphases within the discipline, emphases that could be called "rhetorical" and "communication" studies. A consequence of this early schism is visible in the existing conceptual differences in the discipline. In spite of the fact that the research of many scholars today crosses such narrow boundaries as "social scientific" and "humanistic" research, a schism still exists today. Many communication theorists continue to limit themselves to behaviouristic, social scientific tools only, while others limit themselves to humanistic tools.

Historically the two sides have excluded each other. Rather than displaying an open lack of acceptance, the other is simply ignored. This can be clearly seen in the editor's forward (Burgoon, 1990) to the March 1990 issue of Communication Monographs, where she says that the journal is

> ... first, devoted to publishing only those works that propose, test, modify, or amplify human communication theories, models, and constructs. This means that the central aim of a manuscript must be explication of communication phenomena. ... second, (is) a social science journal . This means that works being submitted must be open to scientific scrutiny and test
>
> ... Manuscripts related to rhetorical theory, for example, may be within the purview of CM if they give rise to claims that could be verified scientifically. (pp. 1-2).

This illustrates the manner in which some communication scholars regard only scientific research as research, see scientific research as their territory, and regard rhetorical theory as not concerned with the study of "communication phenomena". Burgoon proceeds to say that

> rhetorical criticism, historical analyses, and analyses of particular events or speakers, which have as their primary objective the illumination of an event, occasion or behavior, or which are designed to demonstrate the applicability of a particular technique or critical stance, are appropriate for QJS (p. 2)

This demonstrates both an extremely narrow view of communication, and is a profoundly disturbing example of the mentality displayed by some prominent scholars in the field. That this schism has been increasing rather than decreasing can be seen in the following survey of QJS and CM[2]. In QJS, the total percentage of articles of an experimental/social scientific nature from 6.25% in 1960, 7.69% in 1970 and 11.54% in 1980 to 0% in 1990, showing an overall tendency to fall. On the other hand, in CM articles reporting experimental research showed a general tendency to rise --from 52% in 1960, 41.18% in 1970, and 85.71% in 1980, to 93.75% in 1990,

---

[2] These journals were selected as representative of humanistic experimental research in communication, and because of their being oldest in the field. Their use is not intended to in any way undervalue the role of such journals as Text and Performance Quarterly, Journal of Applied Communication Research, and Critical Studies in Mass Communication, whose contents were not felt to be as representative.

w ch demonstrate the steady overall decrease of experimental research articles published in QJS and the corresponding rise of the same in CM.

Thus it can be seen that the use of particular methods of research as advocated by the founding fathers have become the means for the maintenance of a humanistic social-scientific schism in communication.

It is also this author's contention that there has been another consequence of the founding fathers' influence on communication research . Although many may disagree, I feel that Woolbert, Winans and Hunt's stress on the method rather than the spirit of inquiry, their emphasis on the means rather than the end, and their advocacy of adoption of an experimental social scientific model without allowing for the building of a body of theory to support the model, led to a problem with the development of original theory. In my opinion, the original contributions to theory have come in our field in the last eighty years have been far less than they could and should have been. Much of the research-based knowledge that does exist is, as Frey, Botan, Freidman, and Kreps (1991) point out, "limited and fragmented." (p. 26).I feel that the reason for this lies in the fact that far too little of the experimental social scientific research in communication is linked to, or develops, some established theoretical body *original* and *exclusive* to our field. As Blalock (1984) points out,

> What is most essential is the development of a set of norms and an intellectual climate that stress the importance of always asking this of any piece of empirical research: What *theoretical* questions or issues are being addressed, and how are these questions linked to some larger body of theoretical knowledge in this field? How can a particular study --which necessarily deals with some concrete set of data referring to a specific time and place-- be assessed in terms of the light it sheds on theoretical questions that have been formulated in more general terms?"

It would be interesting to investigate just exactly how much of the experimental social scientific research in communication can fulfill this basic criterion . In Speech Communication, it seems, we have too broad a field, and a too narrow one. The problem would seem to lie not in the use of the

social scientific method, but in its use without the primary development of a body of *original* theory it could build up and support. Too much of communication is borrowed from such related disciplines as psychology, sociology, and philosophy.

Having considered the early influences on communication research, and some of the consequences of the adoption of the existing research models, we should ask ourselves, with Bochner and Eisenberg (1990), whether it is not time to rethink the early influences and work towards the adoption of a new research combining social scientific humanistic research influences, with a stress on the spirit of inquiry.

References

Blalock, H. M. (1984). Basic dilemmas in the social sciences. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Bochner, A. P., & Eisenberg, E. M. (1985). Legitimizing Speech Communication: An examination of coherence and cohesion in the development of the discipline. In T. Benson (Ed.). Speech communication in the twentieth century. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. 299-321.

Brooks, Keith. (1959). A tabular summary of the journals of the Speech Association of America: 1935-58. Speech Monographs, 26, 313-319.

Cohen, H. (1985). The development of research in Speech Communication: A historical perspective. In T. Benson (Ed.). Speech communication in the twentieth century. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. 281-298.

Cohen, H. (1994). The History of Speech Communication. Annandale, VA: The Speech Communication Association.

Edel, A. (1990). Relating humanities and social thought. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Frey, L. R., Botan, C. H., Friedman, P. G., & Kreps, G. L. (1991). Investigating Communication. Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice Hall.

Hunt, E. L. (1915). The scientific spirit in public speaking. Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking, 1, 185-193.

Hunt, E. L. (1917). Academic public speaking. Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking 3, 28-36.

Knower, F. H. (1935). Twenty years of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 21, 403-409.

Leff, M. E., & Procario, M. O. (1990). Rhetorical theory in Speech Communication. In T. Benson (Ed.). Speech communication in the twentieth century. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. 1-27.

O'Neill, J. M. (1915, April). The national association. Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking, 1, 51-58.

Research Committee. (1915). Research in public speaking. Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking, 1, 24-32.

Winans, J. A. (1915, April). The need for research. Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking, 1, 17-23.

Winans, J. A. (1915, July). Should we worry? Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking, 2, 197-291.

Woolbert, C. H. (1916). The organizations of departments of speech science in universities. Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking, 2, 64-77.

Woolbert, C. H. (1917). Some suggestions as to methods in research. Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking, 3, 249-264.